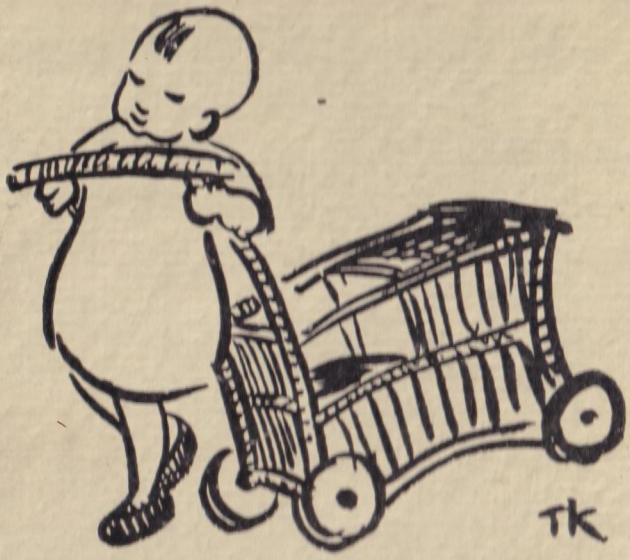
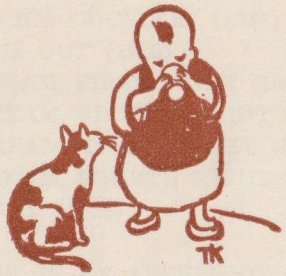


SELECTIONS FROM FENG TSE-KAI'S DRAWINGS OF CHILDREN

FROM FENG TSE-KAI'S DRAWINGS OF CHILDREN

SELECTIONS MADE BY
WANG CHAO-WEN



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ABOUT THE ARTIST

A WORD FROM THE ARTIST

When I did these drawings thirty years ago, at the age of twenty-seven, I was already the father of three children. Like all young fathers, I was very fond of them, loved them with all my heart. Their laughter made me happier than my own joys. Their tears made me sadder than my own sorrows. When they enjoyed their food, I was more satisfied than if I ate myself. And when they tumbled, I felt a greater pain than if I had tripped myself. . . . I really gave my heart to my children, and so I began drawing these pictures.

We could not afford much help in our family. I had to help looking after the children when I came home from school-teaching. I held them in my arms, fed them, drew pictures to amuse them, and sang them to sleep. Sometimes I took their blocks to make automobiles or rode in a "train" with them, on a set of stools. Whatever interested them was very near and dear to me and I always endeavoured to share their life. The themes for these pictures were born of this closeness.

I learnt to understand children very well from my love of the children and this feeling of closeness to them, which helped me discover a world quite different from that of the grown-ups. Children are rich in feeling, but they lack in sense. They have many wishes which they cannot suppress. Their world is vast and free and one in which they let their imagination run wild. The roof of the house can be taken off, so that one can look at aeroplanes; grass and flowers can grow in their cots, with butterflies fluttering around them

for amusement; chairs can be made to wear shoes; railway lines and stations can be built in any room; brother and sister can play at being bridegroom and bride. One can even ask for the moon in the sky. . . .

Grown-ups laugh at such "silliness," speak of their life as "child's-play," scold them for their "naughtiness" and forbid them to be "noisy." People who lack understanding see only this side of the children, but there is really much more to them. I love children and want to be near them. And I always try to understand them and believe there must be a reason for their doings which are worth our attention. These drawings are, therefore, a labour of love.

I often put myself in the children's place to observe life. That is, to observe them I often become a child myself. I remember having done a picture like this then: There is a room with an extraordinarily high and big table, big chairs and a huge bed. A grown-up is climbing on to a chair which comes up to above his chest. He is trying to climb up, quite obviously it is very difficult. Climbing up on the bed is no less difficult because it is as high as the chair. To get a drink of water is like reaching for the stars because his head barely reaches as high as the table, and the glass, much bigger than his hands, stands in the middle of the huge table. I gave this picture the title "Seen with the Eyes of a Child."

This reflected my feelings at the time: I felt that most grown-ups saw children as potential adults, expecting them to act as such in childhood, quite ready to ignore that this was only the preparatory stage for adolescence. Therefore the furniture in the house is always made for grown-ups to suit their convenience and comfort. Children feel very uncomfortable living among grown-ups. They suffer spiritually too, because grown-ups do not fathom their spiritual life. I have seen a boy around seven, dressed in a long gown, complete with jacket and felt hat who was told to walk like his father; and a girl of the same age, powdered and rouged, being taken by her parents to the hairdresser's to get a permanent wave and learning to be a society woman like her mother. I am still horrified when I think of these two children. To me, they are distortions of human beings.

I thought then that, to grow from a child into an adult, was like turning from a caterpillar into a butterfly. The life of a caterpillar was very different from that of a butterfly. The grown-ups I described were tying wings to caterpillars and telling them to fly like butterflies; while I was like a butterfly that folded its wings to crawl with the caterpillars. Thus I was enabled to understand the children's world and their feelings and I took special delight in drawing these pictures.

What I have said here are only some of the incidents and impressions of thirty years ago when I was making these drawings. They may be taken as the motive-power of my creative experience.

February 7, 1955
Shanghai

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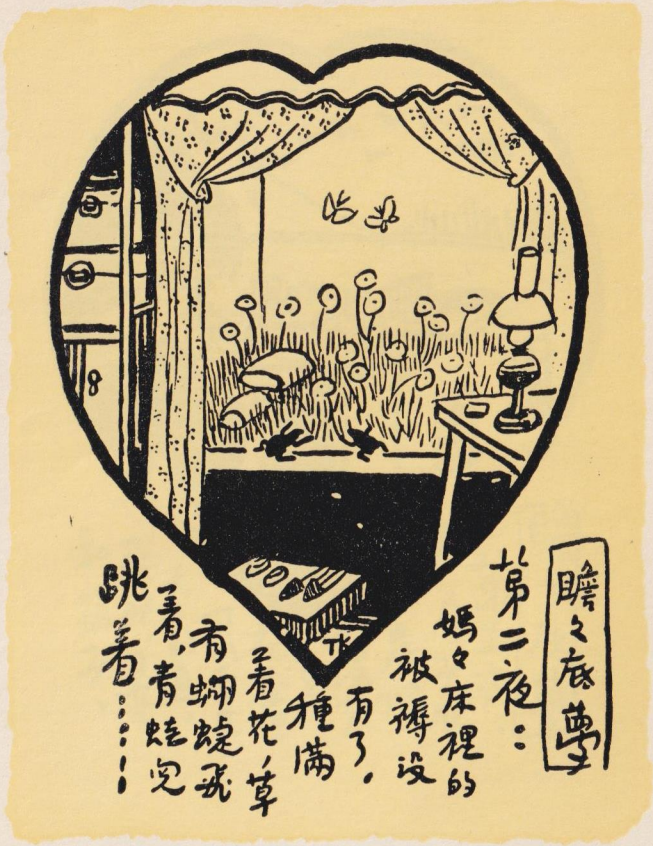
CHANCHAN'S DREAM—FIRST NIGHT (1926)
The table has disappeared. Everything is on the floor—the clock, father's violin, mother's scissors....



CHANCHAN'S DREAM—SECOND NIGHT (1926)
Instead of bed-clothes, there is grass on the bed, there are flowers, butterflies flutter about, frogs frolick.

CHANCHAN'S DREAM—THIRD NIGHT (1926)
The roof is off the house. You look up at the sky and see birds, an aeroplane, the moon and a kite.

CHANCHAN'S DREAM—FOURTH NIGHT (1926)
All sorts of pedlars sit outside the gate all day long.

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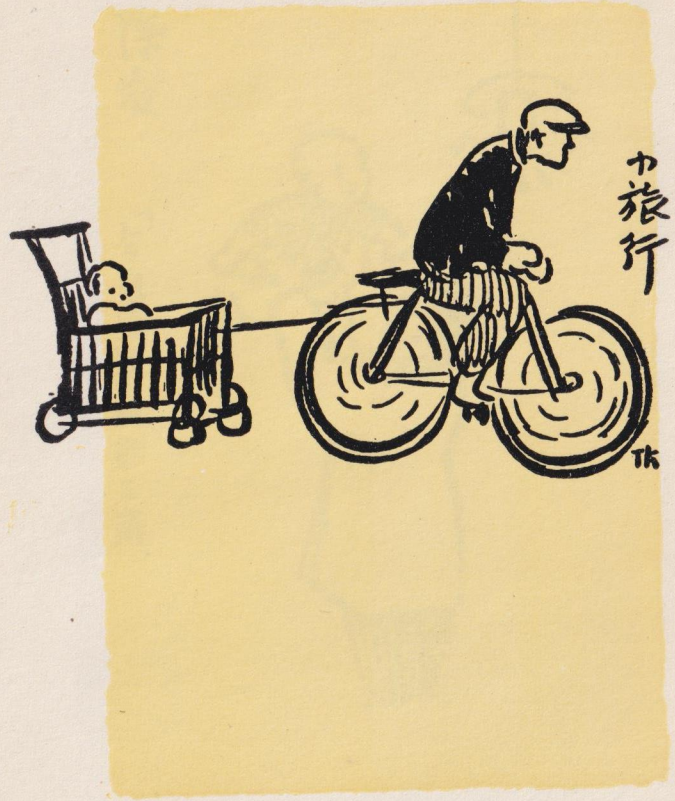

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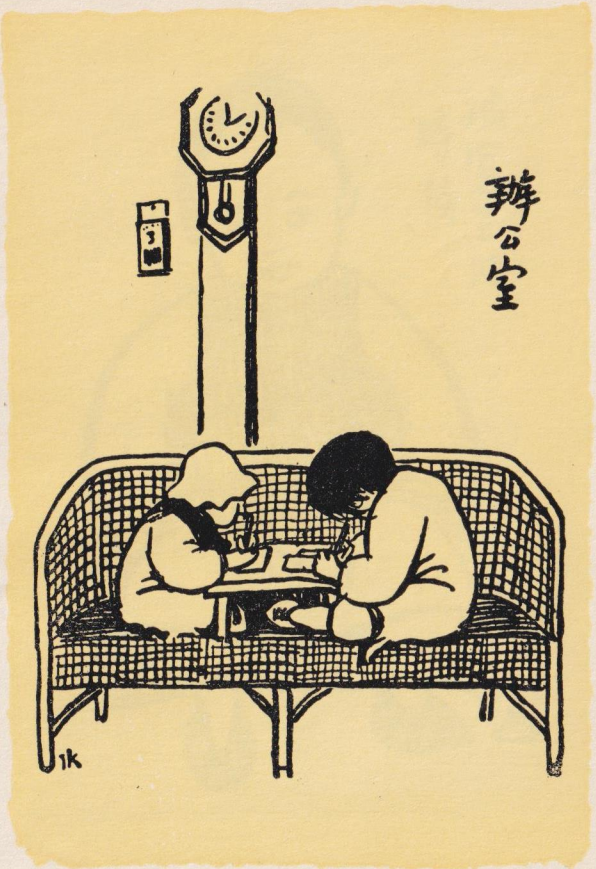

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Feng Tse-kai was born in Chekiang Province in 1898. In his youth, he went to Japan to study music and art. After his return to China, he taught in secondary schools and for a time was editor in a publishing house. During the Anti-Japanese War, he taught art and music in Chungking, Kweilin and other places in the interior of China. He also took up free-lance writing and translation work. Some collections of drawings he published won him wide acclaim, for instance, *Drawings of Children, Sounds of the City* and *Life at Close Quarters.* He is now vice-chairman of the Shanghai branch of the Union of Chinese Artists and a deputy to the Shanghai People's Congress.

Feng Tse-kai, who signs his works "TK," uses the Chinese brush for his drawings in simple, vigorous strokes. The 48 drawings in this collection were chosen from his works done in the period from 1925 to 1935.

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